

THE MIND'S EYE

A Liberal Arts Journal
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts



Struggle for a Home *By Jim Niedbalski*

The Gift of the Falcon *By Mary Ellen Cohane*

**Changing Reputations: Nature and Naturalists in
Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*** *By William Montgomery*

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First Bird *Poetry By Mark Daniel Miller*

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ISSN 1098-0512

The Mind's Eye, a journal of scholarly and creative work, is edited and published twice annually by the faculty of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. While emphasizing articles of scholarly merit, *The Mind's Eye* focuses on a general communication of ideas of interest to a liberal arts college. We welcome expository essays as well as fiction, poetry and art. Please refer to the inside back cover for a list of submission guidelines.

The Mind's Eye is funded by the office of Dr. Ashim Basu, Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

Formerly North Adams State College

375 Church Street

North Adams, MA 01247-4100

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The Editor's File

As we continue to publish the scholarly and literary efforts of our colleagues, I recall a comment by former *Mind's Eye* editor Charlie McIsaac: "Sit at your typewriter and see if you have something to say." Even though, for most of us, the typewriter has been replaced by the keyboard, Charlie's challenge remains as true now as it was then. As the diverse and provocative contributions to this edition suggest, *The Mind's Eye* continues to inspire our faculty to think and write, to explore those areas of thought and literary expression which revitalize the personal and educational experience. Our stated mission is to nurture this process and to share it with the College and broader academic community. So far, so good: but the challenge as well as the opportunity remain. Submissions are welcome any time; deadline for the Fall edition is July 15.

Changing Reputations: Nature and Naturalists in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*

BY WILLIAM MONTGOMERY

It is a commonplace that great scientists owe great debts to their predecessors. Newton is said to have remarked that he could see further than others because he stood on the shoulders of giants, and this comment has been accepted as a truism by scientists from his day to ours (Merton). Nevertheless, the relationship between a revolutionary scientist and the people who made his or her work possible is complex. To innovate is to change, to alter, and to modify. The innovator redefines previous work even in making use of it (Kuhn ch. 11).

Charles Darwin was just such a figure. In developing his evolutionary ideas he scoured the scientific literature of his day and pursued complete strangers with odd questions about their special knowledge. His obligations to others were enormous, and yet the use he made of this assembled material was frequently quite novel. He was particularly indebted to the geologist Charles Lyell, who influenced some of the earliest research he ever did and who became an important mentor and friend as his career developed.

Still, as Darwin began thinking about evolution, he grew beyond the more conservative Lyell. He used Lyell's geological ideas but not always in ways that Lyell had intended. Darwin took special care to credit Lyell's thinking, yet even as he acknowledged his friend's work he gave it a new twist.

Darwin did not always treat other scientists as generously as he did Lyell. Darwin could be almost negligent in recognizing scientists with whom he did not want to identify himself. He was terse in dismissing the work of his evolutionary forerunner, Robert Chambers; and he had little more to say about Robert Malthus, who had inspired his idea of natural selection. They were not personal friends, and Darwin made no extra effort to enhance their reputations; nevertheless, he treated their ideas much as he had Lyell's, altering even as he borrowed.

Darwin's great evolutionary book *On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859, the fruit of a long period of thought and research. He first became convinced of the truth of evolution in March of 1837, shortly after his return from a round-the-world voyage of scientific collecting and observation aboard H.M.S. *Beagle* (Sulloway). In the intervening period he worked steadily, bringing out six books and a number of major articles, mostly on geology. At the same time he was also reading widely, conducting experiments, and making extensive notes on the subject of species. Darwin kept in close touch with many of the ablest scientists in England and took pains to make sure that his information was complete and up-to-date. Fortunately, he preserved many of his notes, and his correspondents usually saved his letters (Barrett; Burkhardt and Smith). Thus, we are unusually well-informed about his opinions of other scientists and their work.

One individual who attracted Darwin's attention was the publisher and sometime geologist Robert Chambers, author of *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*. This book, published anonymously in 1844, had already advanced a theory of evolution. During the 1830s and early 1840s, geologists had discovered a sequence of fossil forms from extremely primitive invertebrates to mammals quite similar to those now living, which could be identi-

fied with successive layers of sedimentary rock. The oldest, most deeply buried rocks contained the most primitive forms, and as one traced the layers toward the present, the number of modern forms increased and grew more familiar. To Chambers, this was a clear sign of evolutionary development, as he explained to fascinated readers in 1844 (148–150). Chambers reassured his readers that this progress was not the result of any blind, mechanical force. God may not have created each plant and animal individually, but it was through the natural development of His laws that ever higher beings came into existence (152–164).

Darwin referred to the *Vestiges* in the Introduction to the *Origin of Species*, spelling out his chief reservation about Chambers's idea. In Darwin's eyes it was not enough to offer evidence that species had evolved. A truly successful theory also had to make clear how species were modified to thrive in their environment.

The author of the 'Vestiges of Creation' would, I presume, say that, after a certain unknown number of generations, some bird had given birth to a woodpecker and some plant to the misseltoe, and that these had been produced perfect as we now see them; but the assumption seems to me to be no explanation, for it leaves the case of the coadaptations of the organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life, untouched and unexplained. (3–4)

Explaining the coadaptations of nature was, of course, one of the major goals of the *Origin of Species*. The reference to Chambers's book thus served Darwin as a convenient springboard for an explanation of his own intentions. He did not name the author since Chambers was still protecting his anonymity and would do so to the end of his life in 1884. However, Darwin had guessed his identity in early 1846 after reading Chambers's anonymous reply to a harsh review of the *Vestiges* (To J. D. Hooker [Feb. 10, 1846] in Burkhardt and Smith 3:289). A year later Darwin had his guess confirmed, if ever so discreetly, by Chambers himself.

Darwin went to see Chambers in London in early March, 1847. Darwin had become embroiled in a dispute over his theory about the origins of the raised beaches that line the walls of Glen Roy in

Scotland. He hoped to obtain from Chambers more information about Glen Roy and about the views of the Scottish geologist David Milne, who had criticized his work. Darwin and Chambers had never met before, but they got on well, and Darwin evidently considered Chambers's information useful. A punctiliously courteous man, Darwin asked no questions about the *Vestiges*—after all, Chambers would only have answered “no.” In mid-April, though, Darwin received an anonymous, but revealing present in the mail, a presentation copy of the sixth edition of the *Vestiges*. The gift left him quite confident that he was right about its author (To Robert Chambers, Feb. 28, 1847 and To J. D. Hooker, April 18, 1847, in Burkhardt and Smith 4:19 and 36).

Scientists had very diverse reactions to the *Vestiges*. The young explorer Alfred Russel Wallace was immediately converted by Chambers, and started looking for evidence to bolster his views (McKinney 9–12). However, the usual reaction was quite negative. Adam Sedgwick, the pious Cambridge professor of geology, gave it a bitterly hostile review when it first appeared (Secord in Chambers xxxi–xxxii). Darwin, who of course sympathized with Chambers's purposes even if he rejected many of his scientific mistakes, was appalled at the review. It inspired him to move very carefully in revealing his own ideas. Darwin got another jolt in 1854 when Thomas Henry Huxley, whom he had begun to think of as a possible supporter, gave the tenth edition of the *Vestiges* a cutting review. Huxley had no religious objections to evolution, but he would not forgive the amateurishness of some passages in the book, and he genuinely disagreed with Chambers's belief in geological progress (Richards 148–49). This was awkward for Darwin, who had begun to believe in some measure of progress himself. He gently noted to Huxley, “I am almost as unorthodox about species as the *Vestiges* itself, although I hope not *quite* so unphilosophical.” (To T. H. Huxley, Sept. 2, [1854], Burkhardt and Smith 5:213)

Darwin's comments in the Introduction to the *Origin* were clearly intended to disarm critics who had disliked Chambers's book. Darwin wanted to make plain at the outset that his own approach to species change was quite different from that of the *Vestiges*. How-

ever, for many biologists Darwin went much too far. Richard Owen, the leading comparative anatomist in England, probably spoke for many of his colleagues when he distanced himself from many of Darwin's innovations. Owen was ambivalent about the transmutation of species. He would not endorse the idea openly, but he clearly sympathized with many of the arguments in its favor. This is obvious in his review of the *Origin*, where he vacillated between criticizing Darwin and suggesting that some transmutationist ideas, especially his own and those of Robert Chambers, did deserve consideration. Chambers had proposed that modifications in the growth process of immature organisms might lead to new species. Owen was not fully persuaded by Chambers's idea, but he obviously preferred it to natural selection (185–186). In addition to his scientific objections to natural selection, Owen may also have disliked its rigorous secularism. Despite Chambers's coy anonymity and despite the criticism that professional scientists had heaped on the *Vestiges*, his theory made a place for the works of God in a way that natural selection did not. If Owen had to choose between them, he would side with Chambers.

Darwin forced Owen to choose, and before long he forced most other scientists to choose as well. Within a decade, the arguments of the *Origin of Species* had converted the majority of biologists in England and North America to the idea of evolution. Nevertheless, argue as he might, he could not convince them that natural selection was the primary mechanism of evolutionary change. Most of them eventually made the same choice that Owen did and opted for some version of evolution along the lines Chambers had suggested. As the historian Peter Bowler has remarked, "The system that had been rejected as virtually atheistic in 1844 was now revived as a fall-back position by those who wished to preserve the role of design against Darwin's more militantly naturalistic theory." (*Eclipse* 49) Charles Darwin made Robert Chambers a good Christian in the eyes of their contemporaries. Chambers held to his secret until his death, but after the *Origin of Species* appeared, he had nothing to apologize for.

Darwin and Chambers hardly knew one another, but Darwin

and Charles Lyell were close friends and scientific allies. Lyell, a wealthy Scottish landowner, had studied law as a young man but could not practice due to bad eyesight. Since he enjoyed an independent income, he chose to devote his life to geology and soon established himself as one of the leading members of the socially prestigious Geological Society of London. He was particularly known for his studies of volcanos, the Tertiary period, movement in the earth's crust, and those recent deposits that his contemporaries called Diluvial and that we call Pleistocene. Lyell did more than anyone else to establish that these deposits could not have been produced by a gigantic prehistoric flood in the manner of the Biblical deluge and must have been produced by more gradual processes (Herbert 489).

Darwin had first become aware of Lyell's ideas aboard the *Beagle*, where he read Lyell's newly published masterpiece, the *Principles of Geology*. According to Lyell, all of past geology could be explained by references to processes still observable. Earthquakes, volcanos, and erosion were the principle active events of geology. The land might rise and gradually be worn away or it might subside, but everything happened slowly over vast expanses of time. To young Darwin, chipping fossils out of South American river beds, Lyell's message was immediately plausible. Darwin was discovering the remains of large Pleistocene mammals whose collective demise demanded explanation. Most geologists of the time assumed that such animals must have been destroyed by some great deluge, far more destructive than anything that humans had witnessed: this was the view of Alcide d'Orbigny, who had also explored in South America. Darwin, however, followed Lyell in insisting that they had perished a few at a time in the sort of ordinary floods, famines, and ferocity that overcome living beings every day (*Voyage* 165–66).

The greatest triumph of Darwin's voyage was the theory he devised to explain the phenomenon of coral reefs. His experience in studying the rising seacoast of Chile supported Lyell's idea of the importance of gradual changes in the elevation of the land. Thinking about his forthcoming trip to the Pacific, Darwin surmised that where coastlines or tropical islands were subsiding, coral reefs might

develop as corals slowly built upward on top of one another. As each dying generation sank further beneath the waves, it would provide a platform for the support of its offspring. This was an improvement on Lyell's own rather implausible notion that such reefs simply formed on the tops of extinct volcanos, and Darwin was able to visit a large number of reefs in the Pacific and Indian Oceans that exemplified the process at work (*Structure*).

Following Darwin's return to England, he and Lyell were soon friends. The older man had high praise for Darwin's coral reef theory and encouraged him in publishing the findings of his voyage. For his part, Darwin became the most important supporter of Lyell's ideas among the scientists who gathered at the Geological Society of London. Even after Darwin moved from London to Down, the two kept in touch through long letters offering advice and suggestions on one another's books. As Darwin freely admitted, all his early geological books "came half out of Lyell's brains." (To Leonard Horner, Aug. 29, [1844], Burkhardt and Smith 3:55) For his part, Lyell appreciated Darwin's support, for he was often at odds with most of his other colleagues on important issues. He insisted that the past could be entirely explained through gradual processes without reference to great catastrophes, a point that was also important to Darwin. Even more strikingly, Lyell recognized no discernable direction in the geological past, only an endless recycling of the material landscape as it rose and decayed. Lyell extended this idea even to the fossils in the rocks, professing to detect no sign of progress over time. He recognized, of course, that older formations seemed to contain no remains of higher animals or plants; however, he dismissed their absence as an accident of poor preservation. Sooner or later examples would be found (Lyell 130–153).

Most other geologists disagreed completely with this idea. Their research showed increasing numbers of higher forms in the more recent formations, and as their studies became more thorough, they found no exceptions to this rule. Darwin's reaction was more complicated. Privately, he had come to believe in evolution; for him, the higher forms must somehow have arisen from lower ones. Lyell's antiprogessive theory might seem inconsistent with evolu-

tion, and Lyell had—in part for this very reason—opposed the evolutionary ideas of Jean Baptiste Lamarck. Nevertheless, Darwin had his own problems with the progressivist belief in a geological record that was relatively intact. For the most part, surviving fossils show little indication of change over time. They may progress in a general sense, but examples of gradual transition from one form to another are unusual. If Darwin wanted to defend evolution, he, like Lyell, also had to assume that the preserved fossils represent only a small remnant of the living beings that once existed (Rudwick ch. 4). *The Origin of Species* records Darwin's agreement with Lyell as forcefully as possible. He completely endorsed Lyell's idea that the rocks bear testimony to an enormous passage of time. In fact, he thought Lyell's work on this subject had achieved "a revolution in natural science." (282) Darwin urged anyone who examined great sedimentary deposits thousands of feet thick to "remember Lyell's profound remark, that the thickness and extent of sedimentary formations are the result and measure of the degradation which the earth's crust has elsewhere suffered." (283–284) To be sure, this idea of an earth that constantly recycled its materials was by no means original with Lyell; it was pioneered by James Hutton, Lyell's Scottish predecessor (Bowler, *Evolution* 45–49). Nevertheless, in the *Origin*, Darwin chose to emphasize the work of his friend.

When Darwin set out to defend the idea that the fossil record has been poorly preserved, he also identified Lyell, along with Edward Forbes, as the chief advocate of this position. Indeed, at one point he echoed Lyell's antiprogressivist faith that mammals might well have existed in the older history of the earth even if their fossils had not yet been found. "Nor is their rarity surprising, when we remember how large a proportion of the bones of tertiary mammals have been discovered either in caves or in lacustrine deposits; and that not a cave or true lacustrine bed is known belonging to the age of our secondary or palaeozoic formations." (289) Of course, the real point of this argument was not so much to defend Lyell as to explain away the scarcity of intermediate gradations between fossil forms (293); still, it was an awkward concession for an evolutionist to make.

In a later passage Darwin grappled directly with the issue of evolutionary progress. It gave him a great deal of trouble because, as he put it, "naturalists have not as yet defined to each other's satisfaction what is meant by high and low forms." (336) He mentioned the zoologist Louis Agassiz, who believed that "ancient animals resemble to a certain extent the embryos of recent animals of the same classes." His own response to this idea was ambivalent: "I must follow Pictet and Huxley in thinking that the truth of this doctrine is very far from proved. Yet I fully expect to see it hereafter confirmed, at least in regard to subordinate groups, which have branched off from each other within comparatively recent times." (338) Darwin's expertise in comparative anatomy was limited to barnacles, and he was reluctant to challenge the authority of Huxley, who had excoriated Chambers over just this issue (Richards 145-46). Still, as an evolutionist, he could hardly reject the notion of progress entirely. In saying this, he was not necessarily contradicting his mentor Lyell. If progress had occurred only among subordinate groups of recent origin, paleozoic mammals might yet be unearthed.

In this way, Darwin avoided serious disagreement with Lyell while maintaining some degree of evolutionary progress. There was not very much progress, and it took place rather late in the game among creatures that all belonged to the same general category. Darwin did not actually mention Lyell in making this formulation, but it was probably no accident that his modest claims for progress fell within the permissible limits of Lyell's thinking. It was probably also no accident that Darwin allowed himself just enough progress to accommodate the emergence of human beings from some more primitive mammalian ancestor. It was a tight squeeze, but he cleared the obstacles on both sides. As a result, Darwin had achieved quite a coup. He had turned Lyell, the defender of a static model of the earth and England's most articulate critic of Lamarck, into a veritable prophet of evolution. Indeed he even managed to associate Lyell's idea of gradualism with the concept of natural selection, insisting that selection worked much like the action of erosion grinding away on a shoreline (95). Readers of Darwin's

chapters on geology can virtually hear Lyell crying in the wilderness. Darwin's formula of geological gradualism equals evolution and his oh-so-modest vision of evolutionary progress were tailor-made to Lyell's uniformitarian beliefs. Just as Darwin made Chambers a Christian, he made Lyell an evolutionist. All that was needed was for the grand old man to murmur his assent.

The question of progress affected all of Darwin's thoughts about geology, but it also played a role in his important concept of the struggle for existence. However, this progress was not, as Chambers had imagined it, a built-in feature of living forms. Rather it occurred as the indirect result of random variation and the unequal success of plants and animals in coping with their environment. In the *Origin*, Darwin explained that plants and animals do not enjoy the same opportunities to reproduce their kind. In practice, most members of any species perish before they get the opportunity. It was easy to demonstrate this reality; in the absence of checks on population, even slow-breeding creatures can increase their numbers geometrically. It is only a matter of time until they outstrip their food supply. In real life everyone is a competitor, and only a minority have the chance to survive and reproduce (62–68).

Naturalists had long been aware that life in a state of nature involved persistent conflict. Charles Lyell had written eloquently about the way that different species encourage or thwart one another. The examples were endless: a large tree might favor shade-loving species while excluding those that needed sun. Destructive insects might ravage some species and thereby make a place for others. As Lyell saw it, nature existed in a kind of rough balance with the expansion of each species checked by the activities of others. The balance was uneasy though, for changes in climate or the mysterious plagues of disease, parasites, and predators might at any time render a previously attractive situation untenable for one species or another. Ultimately, it was a zero-sum game with success for one species representing disaster for another (670–677).

An even more important influence on Darwin's idea of struggle was the theory of population advanced by the political economist Thomas Malthus. A social conservative, Malthus was reacting

against French ideas of social progress and, more immediately, against the British Poor Law, the principle welfare measure of his day (2:38–69). In his eyes, all efforts to improve the lot of the unfortunate through public charity were doomed to failure. No matter how much the poor might strive to improve themselves or how charitably their betters might sacrifice to assist them, unless their reproductive instincts were somehow checked, their numbers would inevitably press against the means of subsistence. As Malthus saw it, this was a general law of nature: “In plants and irrational animals, the view of the subject is simple. They are all impelled by a powerful instinct to the increase of their species;. . . and the superabundant effects are repressed afterwards by want of room and nourishment.” (1:6)

The importance of this idea for evolution is unmistakable. Every effort to develop a theory of evolution by natural selection was based on Malthus’s theory of population. Not only did Darwin rely on Malthus’s theory, but so did his little-known forerunner Patrick Matthew and his rather better-known contemporary, Alfred Russel Wallace. Each of these men regarded the pressure of population as a force that subjected every natural organism to an existence of struggle, a struggle that in most cases would end unsuccessfully (McKinney 54–55; Mayr 494–501).

It is worth considering why the idea of natural selection did not occur to Charles Lyell. Like all educated men of his day, Lyell was certainly aware of Malthus’s idea, and he was certainly aware of the struggle for existence among animals. The answer appears to be that Lyell thought of the struggle simply as a contest between species. A species might prosper in the struggle, or it might flounder and be driven to extinction, but members of the species essentially faced a common fate (Lyell 670–677). Darwin differed from Lyell in relating the concept of struggle to the idea of individual variation. He did not reject the idea of a struggle among species, but in considering the pressure of population, he was especially alert to its significance for the individual. Malthus helped him see that the tremendous capacity of all living creatures to reproduce put them at odds with others of their own kind. Since they all occupied the

same territory, relied on the same food, and feared the same threats, they vied with one another to a degree that other, less closely related forms, did not (75–76).

Darwin illustrated the practical consequence of this competition by asking his readers to imagine a situation in which wolves were confronted with a change in the numbers of their customary prey. If swift animals, such as deer, became more important to these wolves, "the swiftest and slimmest wolves would have the best chance of surviving, and so be preserved or selected. . ." (90) In other words, selection constantly acts to adapt creatures to their environmental circumstances, allowing them to meet new challenges. However, selection does something more. In some cases, it is able to create entirely new creatures by making changes in the structure and function of their organs. For example, under the right circumstances it might have created bats by gradual modification of an animal rather like a flying lemur (180–181). Even more radically, it might have produced the first land-dwelling vertebrates by converting the swimbladder of a fish into a functioning lung (190–191).

Darwin's modification of Malthus's theory gave him a mechanism which explained the progress he thought he saw in nature. He made this explicit in his discussion of geology: "But in one particular sense the more recent forms must, on my theory, be higher than the more ancient; for each new species is formed by having had some advantage in the struggle for life over other and preceding forms." (337) Darwin might still join Lyell in expecting the discovery of Paleozoic mammals, but he was going to have some measure of progress, and Malthus had showed the way to a mechanism that would produce it. Intellectually, Malthus had provided the key to natural selection; personally, he had released Darwin from his intellectual tutelage under Charles Lyell. *Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs* had indeed come half out of Lyell's brain; *On the Origin of Species* had not.

Robert Malthus was a fashionable thinker in England during the 1830s. His arguments had considerable weight in the highly contentious debates over the Poor Law. British Whigs, fed up with

increases in local taxes to support the old system of poor relief, had called on Malthus to justify restricting welfare to the inhabitants of the poor houses. The New Poor Law was actually passed before Darwin returned from the *Beagle* voyage, and we have no record of his attitude toward it; however, he was almost certainly exposed to Malthus's ideas from his occasional social contacts with Harriet Martineau, a prominent journalist who advocated Malthus's ideas. Charles's older brother Erasmus courted Martineau for a time, and they met at dinner on several occasions. Darwin's biographers, Adrian Desmond and James Moore, suggest that it was natural for him to adopt an idea that was so commonly represented in his social circle (153-4, 196-7, 201, 216-7, 264-7).

Desmond and Moore have made an important point about the social influences on Darwin, yet their case has its limits. As they themselves recognize, Darwin did not care for Martineau and was relieved when his brother did not marry her. There is really no scale for weighing Darwin's political beliefs against his scientific ambitions, particularly when his beliefs on the political issue in question are essentially unknown. Furthermore, regardless of his reasons for taking up Malthus's population theory, it seems likely that he thought about it differently as he began to recognize its full scientific potential. Malthus had no inkling of the evolutionary implications of his idea, and Darwin mentioned Malthus's name only once in the *Origin of Species* (63).

In effect, Darwin treated Malthus in much the same way that he had treated Robert Chambers. He acknowledged each man's contribution and then proceeded to ignore him. Compare his perfunctory nod to them with his lavish recognition of Charles Lyell. And why not? What he owed to Malthus was merely intellectual. What he owed to Lyell was deeply personal. The painstaking distinctions Darwin drew between his own position and that of Lyell were meant to establish his own independence while at the same time retaining Lyell's good will. He had to gently correct his old mentor while at the same time trying to convert him to a theory he had once rejected outright. Darwin's guarded comments about evolutionary progress testify eloquently to the difficulty of his task.

The *Origin of Species* transformed the intellectual landscape. Robert Chambers, hitherto regarded as an infidel, emerged as the pioneer of Christian evolutionism. Robert Malthus, previously a theoretician of welfare policy, became a proto-ecologist. And Charles Lyell, the bulwark against Lamarck's species transformism, was recostumed as the herald of natural selection. Darwin did not necessarily set out to do all of these things; his main goal was simply to make the best case he could for natural selection and avoid alienating potential supporters whenever possible. However, in constructing his argument for something new, he could not escape changing everything that was old. His book reshaped both science and scientific reputations. Today we remember numerous 19th century scientists as he presented them, not as they might have appeared to their contemporaries. Intellectual influence does not get any stronger than that.

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Poetry

BY MARK DANIEL MILLER

from *Life-List*: First Bird (for R.T.P.)

"Loon!" I cried, half crazy as one,
"Loon! Loon!"
No bird on golden pond, either,
No Walden loon,
Pursued by paddle
Over the smooth surface
Like a Cheshire checker
In a lunatic checker game.
("Suddenly your adversary's checker
Disappears beneath the board,
And the problem is
To place yours nearest to where his
Will appear again.")
No, this bird bobbed
In the mop-water chop
Off Rockport, in Aransas Bay;
Was dwarfed
By the grey immensity
Of sea and sky;
Was silent:
No weird, unearthly yodel

Or maniacal laugh.
Yet there it was,
The black and white checkered back (source
Of the checkerboard metaphor
In Thoreau)
Stark and unmistakable;
The bird (now rapidly receding from view)
As small and plain
As the small, plain, black and white illustration
In my new bird book:
Roger Tory Peterson's
A Field Guide to the Birds
of Texas.
(The loon I had mainly known until then
Was foreign—at least to me.
It was the lavishly-painted, L. L. Bean loon
In the first plate
Of the beginner's guide from Golden.
I can still see it:
The wary stare
Of the bold red eye
Fixing the viewer;
The black head,
With its faint green sheen
And daggerlike bill,
Contrasting sharply
With the pale background:
Water whitening
Towards a distant shore;
The shore
A steep jut
Of pale grey rock,
Topped by a spiraling line
Of deep green fir;
Beyond the fir, a pastel sky
Of softest aquamarine;
A nearer jut

Of fir-topped rock
In the middle distance,
The brown and green
Reflected
Brokenly
In the intimate small waters
Of the cove or pond;
A watery mirror
Of the bird itself
In the immediate foreground,
The reflected image
Blurred by the rolling, concentric ripples
Emanating
From the real thing,
The ripples dividing
The glassy surface
Into broad, expanding rings
Of green and blue;
And in one small spot
On the bird's back,
A white illuminescence
From the white checks
So bright,
It fuzzes the edges
Of the black:
The sheen
Of the soft white sun
In that Northern sky.
I can still see it,
But the loon I was seeing then
Was the loon I had just been taught to see
By Peterson:
The loon right there
Before my eyes.)

"Loon!" I cried
Above the engine's din,

The spray's white hiss,
The tympany of wind about my ears.
"Loon! Loon!"
And all who were not already there
Rushed abaft,
Rushed astern where
A big American flag
Whipped and popped
And the trailing crowd of Laughters
Yukked it up.
The passengers were mostly elderly,
And very kindly,
And took pity
On me, my brothers, and my dad;
For there we were,
Ill-clad and ill-equipped,
Obvious novices
On the M.V. *Whooping Crane*.
(Poor Scouts—though Scouts all,
Either present or past—
We were not prepared
For the rawness of the wind,
The fierceness of the blast;
And the most powerful optical equipment we had
Was the telephoto lens—I don't recall
What "X"—on the turret
Of Dad's old movie camera:
The solid, 8mm, Bell-and-Howell wind-up.
I had that,
Mounted on the spidery tripod.
We didn't even have a pair of binoculars!—
Only the stubby pair of opera glasses
I had received a few years back.
Nevertheless, I saw
The loon—I was always
A good spotter—
And, like the catechist

About to say his catechism
Or the bar mitzvah
About to read his text,
I was nervous but excited,
Confident of my abilities,
And ready
To sing out
The name.)

"Loon!" I cried,
My heart pounding.
"Loon! Loon!"
And all the elders on the boat
Came flocking around me,
Took a look for themselves,
And confirmed;
Then, they congratulated me
On my sighting:
"Good spotting!" they said,
Or "Good bird!"

I was thirteen.
It was April 7th, 1968,
The National Day of Mourning
For Dr. King.
(And what was Mom thinking
As she read the Sunday papers
While she waited for us
Back at the Sea Gun Inn?)

During the several years that I had been birding
Seriously, I had started my life-list
All over again
Several times; for the more I learned,
The more I would eventually come to doubt
The validity of certain sightings
And, doubting part,
Would eventually so derogate
The whole

That—characteristically—I yearned
For a fresh beginning,
A new start.

Since “Loon, Common”
Was the first bird
On the A. O. U. Checklist
(A serendipitous neatness);
Since I expected to list
A lot of birds
On this trip to Aransas
(And did: 49 the first day—
Including the Whooper—
Another dozen the next);
And especially since, with this bird,
I felt I had made it—
Felt I had finally been initiated
Into the cult
Of the full-fledged birder—
I decided again,
Right then and there,
To start my life-list
From scratch.

Or, rather, I decided to start
With this:

1. Common Loon

Aransas Bay (from the M.V. 4/7/68
Whooping Crane), Aransas
County, Texas

“Loon!” I had cried, half crazy as one,
“Loon! Loon!”
And as I watched it—
A checkered flag afloat—
Rollercoaster over
The waves of our wake,
I felt that, while I had won
One race, another
Had just begun.

Struggle for a Home

BY JIM NIEDBALSKI

Jim Niedbalski, an adjunct English professor at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, wrote his master's thesis for the Professional Writing program at University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth on the impact of Quebec hydroelectric development on the Cree people. This article represents a portion of his thesis.

The 300-mile-long Rupert River is one of the great rivers of the James Bay region in northern Quebec, second in size only to the La Grande River. Its headwaters is the huge Lake Mistassini, a 75-mile-long by 10-mile-wide gouge at the southeastern edge of the James Bay Territory. The Rupert empties from the west side of the lake and flows through small lakes and riverine sections for about 150 miles. It then pools in Lake Nemaska, about halfway between the source and the mouth on Rupert Bay, a southerly extension of James Bay.

For centuries, a couple hundred Crees gathered every summer on the west shore of Lake Nemaska, which in Cree means "lake of many big fish." During the brief warm season, the Crees netted bottom-dwelling sturgeon and caught trout in the river. They smoked the fish and prepared for the long hunting and trapping seasons ahead. In September, when the winds turn cold and ice begins to form on the lakes, family groups headed out into the bush.

Some went upriver to the headwaters of the Rupert; others downriver toward a series of falls on the Rupert; still others south into the Broadback River drainage. They set up winter camps on their traplines, from which they hunted moose and bear, and trapped beaver and other small animals. In June, after the ice breaks up, they'd portage and paddle back to Lake Nemaska for the annual reunion and summer respite. From the seventeenth through twentieth centuries, they supplied furs to the Hudson's Bay Company in exchange for guns, cookware, clothing, and food staples.

In 1970, their world took a sudden turn.

In the summer of that year, a float plane landed on the deep blue lake and taxied up to the cluster of small cabins, tents, and shacks. A government official climbed out and, without much fanfare, told the Crees they would have to leave their thousand-year-old home. The Cree elders asked why.

"He said that the whole village would be under water soon," said Thomas Jolly, a Nemaska Cree. "Quebec was going to dam the Rupert River. The lake was going to rise about thirty feet." At that level, only the Anglican church steeple and the cemetery would be dry.

The Nemaska Crees knew little of political maneuvering in Montreal and thought they could do nothing except leave. This time, when they left in the fall, they would not have a home to return to in the summer. They packed up their few possessions, left Lake Nemaska, and moved to other Cree villages.

Some went to Mistassini on the southern shore of that lake. Others went to the James Bay coast to Waskaganish, then called Rupert House, or to Wemindji, then called Painted Hills for the colorful clay formations. The other Crees accepted the Nemaska Crees with varying degrees of civility. The Nemaska dialect was a bit different from those of other bands, and communication was sometimes difficult. Some villages resented the visitors using their traplines to harvest food and fighting ensued. The Nemaska Cree had lost their home — and their sense of place in the Cree territory.

Ironically, the Rupert was never dammed. Instead, Hydro-Quebec, the province's giant public utility, chose in 1972 to dam the mighty La Grande River, 200 miles to the north. The Nemaska Cree,

having left under duress two years earlier, were reluctant to move back to their lake home in case the dam-builders once again claimed their river. The Nottaway-Broadback-Rupert project, which would divert the Rupert and Nottaway rivers to several powerhouses on the Broadback, was still on the drawing board. For several years, the Nemaska Cree remained scattered throughout the territory.

Nemaska Crees get a new home

As a result of the La Grande project plans, the Cree nation, along with their Inuit neighbors to the north, negotiated and signed the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement with the provincial and federal governments in 1975. The Crees relinquished land claims to most of their traditional territory and gave official consent to the project. Future developments were allowed under the agreement, provided they pass a rigorous environmental and cultural impact review. In return, the 6,000 Crees received \$150 million in cash and retained hunting, trapping and fishing rights throughout the territory. Their eight villages would be rebuilt with modern housing and utilities, with three of them linked by road to "the south."

Rather than go back to the uncertainty of their former village on Lake Nemaska, the elders chose a site on Lake Champion, two dozen miles north. A seventy-five mile gravel road connected the new village with the James Bay highway. The old village was used as a fishing camp, but nothing more. The Nemaska Crees had a new place to live, but the traditional meeting place was fading into memory.

In the late 1980s, as the Cree nation braced for its struggle against proposed dams on the Great Whale River, the people felt a renewed sense of pride in their cultural link to the land. Soon, the Nemaska Cree were making an annual summer pilgrimage to the former village, now officially known as Old Nemaska. For the past several years, most of the 500 inhabitants have loaded up their pickup trucks and vans and driven out to the north shore of the lake. There, they clamber into their canoes — wide wood or fiberglass boats seating six or more people that are equipped with outboard motors — and ride the final few miles to their former

home. This usually takes place in early August.

The Rupert-Broadback trip

In late July 1994, Troy Gipps and I drove the 800 miles north from Massachusetts to Nemaska. We planned to start our 200-mile canoe trip near the new village, paddle upstream into the Rupert River drainage, and then portage into the Broadback River drainage and follow that big river to Rupert Bay and Waskaganish. This would be the third of my five canoe expeditions to the James Bay Territory, of which Gipps, an alumnus of Massachusetts College, would accompany me on four.

As on all the expeditions, we came for the adventure of paddling wilderness rivers and embracing a landscape mostly untouched by man. We also came to further learn about the proud Cree people and to try to understand how hydroelectric development has changed their lives.

At the Nemaska village headquarters, we picked up a radio, a bargain rental at two dollars per day, that would be our safety net on our trip. On an expansive meeting table, we rolled out our topographical maps to review our plans. We wanted to get some local insight as to the best route from Lake Nemaska to the Broadback River drainage.

As soon as the maps were spread out on the table, several men appeared from various offices. They had all grown up in the bush — the common term for the backcountry — and probably didn't use maps much. Some of them looked puzzled as they tried to find their familiar routes to the Broadback. Dark, wind-burned fingers traced the blue lines of the map. Some of the older men spoke in Cree to the younger men, who translated the questions about our trip. We told them we wanted to know the shortest overland route to the Broadback River. Within a few minutes, a tangle of several fingers were circling the maps, accompanied by mumbling in Cree and broken English. For a fleeting moment, Troy and I were sorry we had asked.

In a break from the chaos, an elderly Cree nudged my elbow and pointed to a cove in Lake Nemaska. He traced a straight line from the lake over the height of land — far less than a mile of actual

distance — to a series of lakes that emptied into a tiny river. I followed his finger as it zig-zagged along the stream for a few inches — roughly twenty miles — and watched it empty into the Broadback. At that, he waved his hand downstream, cracked a hint of a smile, and left the room without saying a word.

Despite having pored over the map many times before leaving home, Troy and I had never seen that route. Our previously planned route would have had us portaging more than twice the distance of the old Cree's route. The new route turned out to be one of the easiest and most pleasant paddling experiences in five trips to James Bay.

Troy and I rolled up our maps, grabbed the radio, thanked the men, and headed out of the office. Matthew Tanoush, who had given us the radio, stopped us before we reached the door.

"Will you be stopping at Old Nemaska?" he asked. We hadn't planned it, because we didn't know anything was there — the map only indicated an "old village site."

"Everyone will be there next week — won't you be passing through then?" Our route would take us right by the village. "And I have a cabin on Lake Ukau Amikap — use it if you want."

The first two days of the trip required a tortuous upstream paddle and portage into the Rupert River drainage. Out of shape and not used to carrying heavy loads, we struggled up and over rain-drenched rocks and pulled the boat through weed-choked shallows. It rained consistently for those first two days, and the only break in the showers came when a vicious thunderstorm rolled across the water and hammered us with horizontal fury. At the end of the second day, Tanoush's cabin was a welcome relief from the raw, wet weather. By noon the next day, we finally reached current that ran with us instead of against us.

The teenagers and the scouts

On a clear morning four days after leaving Nemaska, Troy and I paddled down the Rupert toward Lake Nemaska. In the distance, several brightly colored tents stood out against the dark green backdrop of spruce trees. Two dozen boats were beached at the village, and a few craft zipped over the wind-whipped blue chop.

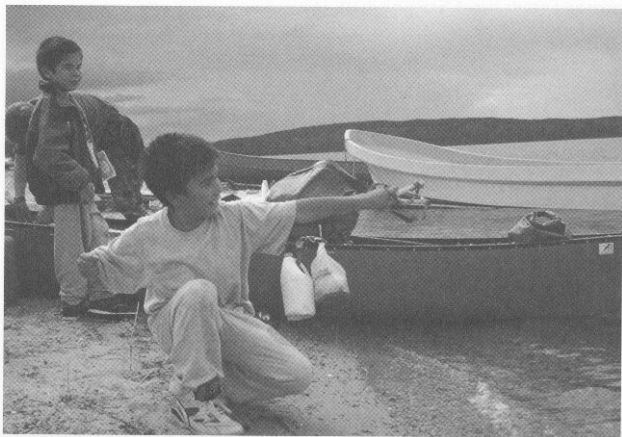
We beached our seventeen-foot canoe — a tiny boat compared to their canoes — and walked up to Tanoush, who had watched us paddle in.

"See any moose?" he asked. We hadn't, but had seen lots of geese. "Good. I don't have any left in my freezer."

On the beach, a dozen children waded into the warm shallow water with plastic buckets and shovels. Two young boys, about six and eight years old, ran up to us, slingshots in hand, and asked what we were doing there. After we explained, Elijah and Simeon (many of the Crees have Biblical names) continued to plunk small stones into the lake as we chatted. The two were brothers who were here with their mother; their father lived in another village. A group of teenagers shuffled by and eyed our canoe and gear.

"Watch out for him," Elijah said, pointing to one of the teenagers. "He's no good. He'll try to steal your stuff." From then on, the young boys were our scouts and our friends.

On a small bluff above the beach, a hundred Crees milled about. Old women tended slabs of sturgeon on racks constructed above smoky fires. Others cleaned the large fish or prepared loaves of



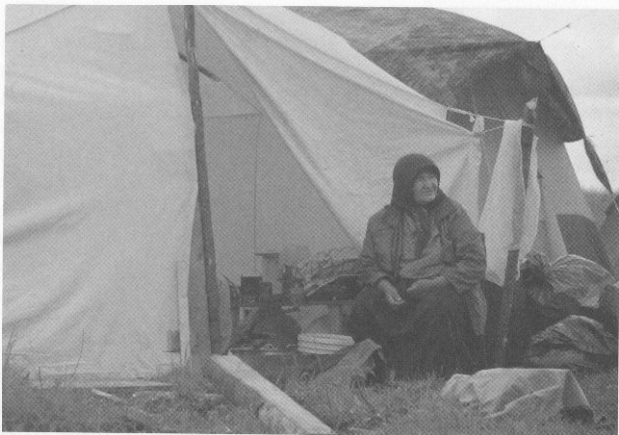
Elijah and Simeon, our two "scouts" at Old Nemaska

bannock. A group of men unloaded lumber from boats and carried it to the church, where another group pounded new siding onto the dilapidated building. And as usual in Cree villages, bands of teenagers wandered around, looking bored despite a flurry of activity around them. Many teens hung out at the makeshift store, where shelves were stocked with canned foods and sweet snacks, reminiscent of the days when the ubiquitous Hudson's Bay Company maintained stores in all Cree villages.

That evening, as the Crees gathered around a bonfire on the beach, I talked with Chief George Wapachee about life in Nemaska before and after the James Bay Agreement. As we spoke, I noticed the same bands of teenagers huddled in a separate group around the fire. I asked Wapachee why the teenagers don't participate in the activities of the villages.

He explained that because so many Crees were separated from their families by the Canadian government's former policy of educating Indian youths in the south, the kids grew up without a grasp of nuclear family life.

"When I was a boy, I had to go to school in Ontario," Wapachee



A Cree elder at her camp at Old Nemaska

said. "Every fall a plane would come here and take me away. I missed my parents so much. I'd come back at the end of June, and stay through the summer, but two months with your family isn't long enough for a young boy."

A widening generation gap

These Crees, who were shipped off to school, now have kids of their own who attend Cree-run schools in their own villages, but because they were separated from their parents during most of their formative years, these Crees did not learn effective parenting skills. Also, the government's Income Security Program, which encourages Crees to hunt and trap in the bush by providing per-diem expense money, often separates the families. While one parent, most often the father, is away from the village for extended periods — they must spend at least 120 days a year in the bush to qualify for a maximum of about \$17,000 a year in benefits — the children stay home to attend school. (An exception is the "goose break," when school is closed for two weeks in the spring and fall to allow entire families to head out to their bush camps to hunt the geese during the birds' annual migrations.) This widens the gap between generations, leaving the teenagers further disconnected from their parents. Cree teenagers today are also swayed by satellite television images of life in the south, and Wapachee said many are ambivalent toward a traditional Cree life.

The next morning, as Troy and I talked to the men rebuilding the church, our two young scouts rushed up to us. "You should check your tents. We saw some kids messing with them," they said.

Our tents had been pulled up and tossed a few yards away, but nothing was missing. The perpetrators had actually started the process of packing up for us, since we were leaving later that day. A few hours later, as we paddled away from Old Nemaska against a stiff breeze, we waved goodbye to Elijah and Simeon, who playfully shot a few stones near our boat. Women flipped fish near rising columns of smoke, and men hammered nails into the revived church. Young children played on the beach, while the teenagers stared listlessly out at the water.

As Old Nemaska faded from sight, it occurred to me that the

teens acted similarly to the average teenager in the south.

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The portage route shown to us in the Nemaska office was there, all right — but sheer stupidity prevented us from finding it right away. The morning after camping at the far end of Lake Nemaska, we saw an overgrown path leading from a cove up a small hill. Although the path did not line up with our compass bearing, we each saddled up a heavy load and took it anyway. The trail soon fizzled out, and we clawed through thick spruce, dragging our heavy packs through the tangled mess. We soon realized we had taken the wrong path, but unwisely decided to keep heading toward a small lake instead of turning back. Lightheaded from hunger, thirst, and exhaustion, we trudged on. Another compass bearing and a hour of endorphin-crazed bushwhacking brought us to the height of land. Troy climbed the tallest spruce, and shouted that he could see the small lake off to the southwest, still a spruce-choked half-mile away. By the time we reached the lake, dropped our packs, and headed back on the *real* portage trail, it was late afternoon.

The trail cut straight through the trees from Lake Encasse to Lake Nemaska, barely rising a hundred feet. It took less than an hour to get back to our canoe. At sunset we started our final portage and arrived at the lake in darkness. Donning headlamps, we loaded up the boat and paddled around until we found a reasonable campsite. As I collapsed into my tent, I could almost hear our Cree friends laughing at us.

• • •

As the sun hung low over Rupert Bay, our two canoes sliced through the small wave train in the last rapid on the Broadback River. Dean Pulver and Bobby Dolan had joined Troy and me at the James Bay Road for the 90-mile trip down the Broadback to Waskaganish. Ten miles of bay stood between us and Waskaganish. Crees there had told me over the phone that we should paddle the shallow Rupert Bay at high tide; otherwise, we'd have to paddle a mile out into the ocean. Near dusk, the tide appeared to be coming in and the weather was good, so we headed north to the village.

Even with the tide, the bay was only a few feet deep 200 yards from shore. A west wind kept pushing us toward shore, and the

going was slow. As the sun dropped, the wind died down, and only the sound of our blades parting the glassy surface accompanied us. We still had a few miles to go, but we paddled slowly to savor our last few hours in the bush. The clear sky offered an amazing display of Northern Lights, directly in our paddling path. Aurora Borealis — “wastuskun,” or “dancing spirits” in Cree — is not as common here as it is farther north in the territory, and this was the first time we’d seen it this trip.

The Lights were so bright it seemed we could almost hear the static electricity dancing across the sky, like the imperceptible sound of windwhipped dry snow. As the lights of the village neared, a new sound replaced the imagined revelry. Hoots and hollers and screams echoed across the bay. Now nearly midnight, we wondered who could be creating such a ruckus.

It was the teenagers.

Marauding gangs of kids patrolled the streets of Waskaganish. We saw them high up on the bluff overlooking the bay, but they didn’t appear to see us. Exhausted by the time we pulled up to the boat dock, we beached our boats and rolled out our sleeping bags onto the dock. My watch read 1:00 a.m. as I zipped up my sleeping bag, and I could still hear laughing and shouting in the distance.

The struggle against despair

One of the first questions I asked Billy Diamond when he met me at the Kashee Lodge in Waskaganish the next day was about the teenagers. Diamond, a Cree in his late forties, was the Crees’ political hero in the 1970s. He was elected Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec in 1973 and became a tough arbitrator in the struggle to preserve Cree life in the face of the La Grande project. With Inuit representative Charlie Watts, he negotiated the James Bay Agreement that brought the Crees and Inuits into the twentieth century. He gained the respect and, in some cases, the fear and disdain of some of the federal and provincial officials and lawyers with whom he fought tirelessly. Some Crees say that power has gone a bit to his head, but whether or not they like him now, Billy Diamond is outspoken and gets things done. A few years ago,

he stepped down as grand chief and came back to Waskaganish, his birthplace, to become chief there.

Two decades of committees, negotiations and politics have taken a toll on his physical appearance. A modern political leader has little time for the bush, and his belly now sags over his belt, making him swagger as he walks.

Today, about two-thirds of the 10,000 James Bay Crees are under age twenty-five, due to a baby boom in the early 1980s after the Crees moved into their new year-round homes. "The teenagers don't grasp the situation of Cree life today," Diamond said. His generation, he said, was frustrated and hopeless, too, and battled with drugs and alcohol. But he and his peers realized that they needed to turn to the land for healing. Cree elders, Diamond said, need to give teenagers responsibility and direction: "There doesn't have to be despair."

To that end, every summer a group of Waskaganish teens and elders paddle up the Pontax River and back down the Rupert in a spirit of cultural connection to the land that has sustained them for 5,000 years.

The Gift of the Falcon

BY MARY ELLEN COHANE

Adapted from Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Ninth Tale of the Fifth Day*.

Dedicated to Patrice and Kaare Bolgen

In the city of Florence, many many years ago, there lived a well-to-do orphan named Mara Giovanna. Mara Giovanna was brought up by her three big brothers. She was lively and loving and very, very spoiled.

She grew up to be the original material girl. She liked fine horses, fine fashions, fine wines, and fine furnishings, but above all, she loved fine foods.

Her favorite dish was roasted peacocks glazed with a honey and cardamom glacé, presented with all the tail feathers stuck back on, nestled on a bed of saffron rice.

Her second favorite dish was calamari al fresco, steamed to a delicate chewiness, bathed in spiced black ink.

She also loved alligator pie, crocodile stew, and possum soup. (Rumor says she adored chile, but chile hadn't been invented yet.)

All the young men in Florence were attracted by her laughing spirit and her lust for life. One in particular, Frederico Alberighi, sent his servants far and wide to find fine foods to please her. His servants went to Norway to find her the most delicate aged rokefisk.

(Rokefisk are whole fish packed in barrels with fir branches, and then buried in a mound of animal muck for a year.) They went to Sweden for lutefisk, which are basically the same thing, but buried in the ground instead of in the muck, and Korea for kim chee, which are also basically the same thing, but with more herbs, and a jar instead of a barrel. Federico's men also travelled to Scotland for haggis—the lungs, liver, and lights of a sheep, packed together with onions, garlic, and oatmeal in a length of intestine, and to Ireland for black pudding, which was basically the same thing, but based on cow instead of sheep. (Mara Giovanna was not a vegetarian.)

All these foods were served to Mara and dozens of other guests in feast after feast. Federico also put on the finest fancy balls, the most elaborate amateur masques and magic shows, and the most exciting jousting contests. Mara Giovanna went to all the feasts, the fancy balls, the masques, and the jousts, but she never said two words to Federico. Pretty soon, he was exhausted, black and blue (from being knocked off horses while all canned up in armor), and out of money. Worse, he had seriously overextended his credit cards.

As a result, he was forced to sell nearly everything he had, and move into a tiny falconer's cottage in the little town of Campi. There he made a frugal living by selling whatever his falcon could hunt for him.

In the meantime, Mara Giovanna had decided that it was time to marry. She looked around at all the suitors she had left, and decided on Rasputine Ristorante Scarpi.

Rasputine Ristorante Scarpi was a sharp-faced man with beetling eyebrows and an avaricious nose. He spent most of his time at court helping the royal treasurer design new public policies such as a "poor tax." (In this case, it meant finding new ways to tax the poor.) Rumor was that Rasputine Ristorante Scarpi had made all his money in the silk tunic trade with China, and that the tunic makers weren't paid all that much. Be that as it may, he enjoyed fine horses, fine fashion, fine wines, fine furnishings, and above all, fine food.

Accordingly, after he and Mara got married, the couple had a sumptuous two weeks together. After that, Rasputine Ristorante

Scarpi had to go on a business trip to the East, from which he never returned.

Mara Giovanni went home to live with her brothers. She wasn't too sad. Seven years later, her husband was declared dead, and Mara Giovanna inherited a lot of money. Better yet, her husband had left her another legacy: a beautiful son, Tomas, who was in his seventh year.

Now, it so happened that everybody who lived in Florence that winter came down with a very bad cold. Mara had it, her brother had it, and for them it came and went, but Tomas had it, and remained very very sick. He was getting paler and weaker by the day, and Mara Giovanna was very very worried. Her brothers suggested that Tomas would do better in the clear country air of Campi, where many of the Florentines had vacation homes. And so Mara and Tomas and all three of her brothers packed up and went to Campi.

It was coming on to winter, and Tomas was no better. That is, he was better, briefly, for a few minutes every day just at sunset. That is when he could see, through his casement window, the mountains of Campi glowing purple and warm brown, lit up with the last beams of the setting sun against a deep blue sky. And circling up in that sky, he would see a falcon, gracefully drifting higher and higher, diving swiftly down to the earth, and then rising again, carrying something magic in its talons. Then the falcon circled slowly down again, and Tomas could just make out, on the right side of its neck, three red feathers, gleaming like gold in the sun.

Except for those brief moments, however, he was becoming more and more silent, pale and weak. Mara Giovanna was worried. "Tomas," she said. "Tell me, please tell me, if there is anything in the world I can give you that would make you feel better."

"There is only one thing, mama," said Tomas. "More than anything else in the world, I would like to have that falcon."

Now, Mara Giovanna knew full well that the falcon was owned by her old suitor, Federico Alberighi. How could she ask this man, who had given up everything he owned for her, to now give her the

very last thing in his possession, his livelihood, the falcon? She knew she would have to find a way, because she loved her son more than anything in the world.

So, the next day, Mara Giovanna went with her serving maid to the little house of Federico Alberighi. She knocked at the door. Federico was shocked to see her at his doorstep.

"Mara Giovanna!" he said. "To think that you should come to my house now!"

"Oh Federico," she said. "I know that it is because of me that you have lost your house, your land, and all your credit cards. I am so sorry. And on top of that, I have come here today. . . I have come here today. . . to. . . to make it up to you by joining you for dinner."

"I am honored," replied the poor falconer. "Please come in, come in, and sit down by the fire while I prepare to serve you." And so Mara and her maid sat down, while Federico ransacked the kitchen in a panic. All he could find was half a trencher of last night's Fetucchine Alfredo, a couple of duck eggs, one brown speckled egg that didn't look fresh at all, and a dented can of Franco-American Spaghetti. Suddenly, a terrible thought came to him. With anguish in his eyes, he looked over at the falcon in the corner, who had been busy making pie crust.

Before he could say a word, the falcon spoke.

"It's over, Fred. You'd better make room for the next bird. I'm outta here. But please believe me, it is a far, far better thing I do than I have ever done before," it said, stabbed itself with a wee pen knife, and fell down, dead, into the pie crust. An hour later, Federico Alberighi and Mara Giovanna were dining on spiced fowl pie. As she spooned up the last morsel in her bowl, Mara resolved to admit why she had really come. "Federico," she said, "I am afraid I didn't come just to feast with you. I have come to ask you for your falcon."

"My. . . falcon?"

"Oh, Federico, I know very well that it is not fair of me to ask and that it is the last thing you. . ."

"My. . . falcon?" he said again.

"I know it is a terrible thing to ask so much of you, but I had no choice. You see, my son. . ."

"My falcon!" he wailed. "You don't understand. I have already . . . given you my falcon!"

Mara Giovanna looked down at the remains of the spiced fowl pie, and then up again at Federico. Then down at the fowl pie again, as she realized what she'd just had for dinner. She thought at first that she would burst out crying, and then she saw the light of generosity and love in his eyes.

"Oh," she said, "the falcon may be gone, but I have found something better."

"Mara!" he cried.

"Federico!" she replied. And so they fell into each other's arms, and then ran into the kitchen, where Federico scooped up the brown speckled egg that didn't look fresh at all, and back to Mara's brothers' house, straight to the couch where her beloved Tomas lay, surrounded by his uncles.

"Tomas," said Mara. "I cannot bring you the falcon, but I bring you happy news. There is going to be a wedding."

"A wedding?" said the brothers. "To this penniless man, Federico Alberighi? You'll use up all your cash."

"Don't worry," said Mara. "We've decided that I will be handling the money. And even if I fail, I would rather have the man without the money than the money without the man."

And so Mara and Federico set a wedding date, and by the light of their love, Tomas got better and better, until he was well enough to bear their wedding rings down the aisle of the little chapel in Campi. And as Mara Giovanna and Federico Alberighi vowed to love each other for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, Tomas looked out through the big chapel window behind them. There, circling slowly in the bright spring air was a falcon. It dove to the earth, and rose again with something magic in its talons. And then, as it drifted back down to earth again, Tomas could just make out, on the right hand side of its neck, three red feathers glinting like gold in the sun.

And they all lived happily ever after there in Campi, as ovo-lacto vegetarians.

Defining Action in Ibsen and Sibelius

BY BRIAN FITZPATRICK

Realism, Symbolism, Nationalism, and Romanticism are broad classifications of artistic styles. They are also familiar terms in describing the work of Ibsen and Sibelius. Realism stands as an exception, since music does not share the particularity offered by speech or writing. Even though the specific meaning of language has been questioned since Nietzsche, words used in a given context provide a reference to the "real" world that is concrete enough for certain dramas to be classified under the term realism. Music also establishes a context, and uses a particular language to define it. But the sonorous nature of its language does not so readily allow for developing a specific equivalency with a characteristic of the real world. Music is too often content with its evocative sonorous power that needn't make reference to physical or tangible subject matter.

With that aspect of music identified, there still remains a similarity between Henrik Ibsen's realism and the music of Jean Sibelius, particularly as evidenced in the latter's *Symphony No. 4*. To understand the affinity between these two men I will refer to Ibsen's *The Master Builder* (1892) and Sibelius's *Symphony No. 4* (1911). The technical, stylistic similarity to be discussed here is the introduction and development of only essential material as a means of creating action.

Most dramas and music develop a contextual relationship in which primary themes are defined against other ideas. An attribute of Ibsen and Sibelius is that thematic development itself remains true to the central theme. The question of what is essential in these works is answered by what is there. Although it might be correctly argued that what is given in any artwork is essential, in these the given themes focus around a limited number of primary ideas, they are nuclear rather than mechanical, self-propelled rather than effected by outside causes. It is because of their intense concentration that each is so penetrating.

Ibsen's action focuses intensely on developing the point of view of the main character Solness, and the ramifications that revolve around him. It may be likened to understanding simultaneously the overt action in Sophocles and the unseen workings of the greater forces, the Gods. *The Master Builder* incorporates the idea of a "greater force" as part of the reality specific to Solness. Although the play couches the action in symbolism, action ensues from the realism at work. This "realism" is ontological in nature. It stems from the beliefs and drives of the characters. It is those beliefs and drives that are supported with symbolism.

A look into the developmental treatment of themes elucidates a belief about how actions in life transpire. Themes are designed, focused, and developed so that the play's coherence results from the concentration of a few innately related conditions. When we understand the drama as a whole, we see that thematic relationships occur through developing the relatively dominant belief system of one character, the master builder. The beliefs held by Solness propel the continuously unfolding action.

Works by other playwrights certainly probe the psyche, and reveal insights that stem from a given condition, but a focused, concentrated, succinct style of treatment belongs to Ibsen and Sibelius. As will be shown, the composer's style lends itself to this kind of organic generation.¹ The stylistic treatment of themes is as similar as possible between these different media. The concern here is not to categorize Sibelius or Ibsen as a realist, but to show that their stylistic treatment of action is similar.

Every action, whether in life, in a play, or in music, takes place within a context. Here the context is created by the playwright and by the composer. The context serves as a parameter, in relation to which the action is understood to cohere, move away, or advance. The action's degree of credibility is further illuminated by the specific qualifiers that define the action itself. How can music bring witness to this kind of action?

Of the seven Sibelius symphonies, the fourth holds an important place. It is often considered the primary example of Sibelius's musical personality and demonstrative of his compositional procedure. In Sibelius's *Symphony No. 4*, the brooding first theme is established in a minor key, with a specific rhythm, and characterized by a tritone, C to F-sharp. The development and statement of the second theme as action—is experienced in relationship to the established context (mood) of

bassoons and low strings



1. First theme of Sibelius's *Symphony No. 4*.

strings



2. Second theme which demonstrates rhythmic diminution of the first theme.

the first. However, the second theme is derived from the first, and remains integrally related to it by the use of characteristic intervals and rhythms. An extreme juxtaposition would result if the first theme were contrasted with a very jubilant, rhythmic second theme. The initial context would have then shifted into a different realm. But this is not the case in Sibelius or Ibsen. The primary theme serves as the source for later material. The development and transformation of the primary theme becomes the action. In the above example, we witness the interrelatedness of themes that operates to provide action in Sibelius. Is there a correlative procedure at work in *The Master Builder*?

In the mid-nineteenth century, social commentary in theatre and painting raised issues of politics, social castes, poor working conditions, and other concerns, all of which were eventually subsumed in the term "realism." Four of Ibsen's plays—*The Master Builder* (1892), *Little Eyolf* (1894), *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899)—are typically grouped together as his late work. One element that distinguishes *The Master Builder* from his earlier plays is Ibsen's turn away from social commentary toward an examination of the individual. This shift in emphasis in *The Master Builder* now makes the application of the term *realism* to a portrayal of the life of society inappropriate. As will be shown below, I redefine the term in relation to *The Master Builder*, to accommodate Ibsen's change of subject matter.

In *The Master Builder*, Hilda, a secondary but important character, makes an outrageous demand of Solness: to build "castles in the air." It is a demand that—although symbolic—becomes significant by what Ibsen reveals about Solness's beliefs, as well as Hilda's. Hilda is primarily a symbolic character,² directly connected to Solness by motifs such as the threatening younger generation, the Solnesses' lost children, and youth and vitality in general. She wants her kingdom, one equated with the power and control Solness believes he must maintain. The symbolic "castles in the air" beckons Solness. His somewhat frenzied state of mind, and his concern about himself as *the master builder*, present, past and future, has gained leverage from Hilda's demand for "castles in the air." This symbolic image,

like the tower Solness climbs, carries the weight of Solness's beliefs and his heedful behavior. Ultimately, the symbols survive and Solness perishes. They illuminate a part of him and eventually inspire him to act. He dies by making an action that represents his selfish attempt at surmounting happiness and ignoring his observations and beliefs about life's capacity to direct him. He has ignored his own beliefs to satisfy arrogance, pride (hubris), and desire. Therefore, the symbolism of the tower and building "castles in the air" is connected to Solness's beliefs.

James Calderwood asked an insightful question that is tied to the symbolism in the play.

How does the play ascend from realistic homes for human beings to romantic castles in the air without causing a total collapse of our most tenuous suspension of disbelief?
(1984, 622)

One answer I am addressing is that the line of action throughout the play is based upon Solness's beliefs. Furthermore, the way Solness understands the events in his life is not beyond belief, but rather intricately developed and webbed into the unfolding story line that pushes the action forward. All of us form some belief about the existence or nonexistence of unseen workings in life; the "circumstances" in life, as Solness put it. Such beliefs are subjective, but very real. My use of the term *realism* will now reflect this aspect of the play: the belief held by Solness concerning how the events in his life have come to materialize. This new definition also reflects the change in Ibsen's subject matter in his late plays, away from social realism, toward the individual and modernity.

The action of the play and the symphony are essentially driven by the development of one aspect of each, the first theme of the music and the personal credo of Solness. Ibsen gives the viewer a hint about Solness's credo when he has the character say: "I cannot help it! I am what I am, and I cannot change my nature!" This perspective is first alluded to as a sign of insanity by Mrs. Solness, the Doctor, and by Solness himself. The insinuation of madness generally assists in making acceptable the more unbelievable character Hilda and her demands. But Solness questions his own sanity

because he is torn by his belief in *how* his place in the world has been formed. His confession early in the play that "circumstances favored me" is a reference to many earlier experiences. But these have yet to be revealed to the audience: the fire, his desire, his scheming to become successful, his conviction that Kaia and Hilda have responded to thoughts he has left unspoken, the "trolls" in oneself. When these things are revealed they assist in making known Solness's belief about the events and "circumstances" in his life. They serve to substantiate his certainty that the circumstances in his life are out of his control. They unveil his teleological view that some higher part of the universe is in operation and has had a role in defining his position. He schemes in accordance to this belief. Such a belief is in alignment with what William James defined as "over-beliefs."

For James, over-beliefs are those beliefs people hold that are beyond scientific proof, but are often the most interesting thing about a person. Researching religious beliefs and conversion as ways people have accounted for their circumstances in life, James finds that an over-belief is typically arrived at in response to an "uneasiness," when the individual is at a "stage of solution or salvation." The person identifies with a "higher part" of the self.

[one] becomes conscious that this higher part is continuous and continuous with a MORE of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of him, and which he can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board of and save himself when all his lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck (1958, 384).

James wrote about over-beliefs in reference to the multifarious experiences in life that people attribute to God or understand as a religious experience, in the seminal 1902 lectures that comprise his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. James himself pragmatically concedes and calls the "higher part of the universe" God, since "God is the natural appellation" Christians have always given it. Although he makes part of his own over-belief clear, that the "subconscious . . . further limits of our being plunge" into this "higher part" (388–89).

Like Solness, we all, whether a believer, atheist, or mystic, understand the workings of the "higher part" in some way, for example, as coincidence, destiny, fate, God's plan, "eternal return" (Nietzsche), "synchronicity" (Jung), or "circumstances." The distinguishing factor resides in the explanation one gives, the belief one holds about what causes our "circumstances" and sets them in operation. Solness believes that God is responsible for the circumstances in his life.

One figurative meaning of Solness's church-building endeavors is blatant, his becoming God-like. In the drama his desire to build churches is connected to his ("over") belief that his "circumstances" are the work of God. The action during the third act revolves around the symbolic act of climbing a tower. The symbolism functions to substantiate points related to his belief. Because now his climb is part of his determination to step outside of his "circumstances," to begin a new life. The action is broadened in scope through symbolism that substantiates Solness's subjective view. It is based in *his* "realism" (as newly defined above). Furthermore, Solness gives a calm and collected confession in the dialogue that directly precedes his final climb. Hilda asks Solness if he is afraid of climbing the tower of the new home and possibly falling to his death. Solness replies, "No . . . I am afraid of retribution." The fact that Solness has a religious "over-belief" is essential to recall.

Solness. I came as a boy from a pious home in the country; and so it seemed to me that this church-building was the noblest task I could set myself . . . I built those poor little churches with such honest and warm and heartfelt devotion that—that—

Hilda. That—? Well?

Solness. Well, that I think that he ought to have been pleased with me.

Hilda. He? What he?

Solness. He who was to have the churches, of course! He to whose honor and glory they were dedicated.

As for the understanding Solness has of his own judgment: "He pleased with me! . . . Oh no, he made me feel clearly enough that he was not pleased with me." As the dialogue continues, Ibsen reveals the ultimate reasoning behind Solness's belief in the "circumstances" that favored him. Throughout the play Solness speaks in a lower, "mysterious" tone when he makes references to his belief that God wanted him to become an "accomplished master in my own sphere—so that I might build all the more glorious churches for him." Ibsen thereby makes known that part of Solness's "over-belief" is that the circumstances occurred as a result of God's plan. When Solness finally does fall, the effect is climactic because his personal credo has not forbidden its occurrence.³

Thematically, Ibsen has developed Solness's beliefs and teleological credo to function as a continuous thread around which the action spins.

Likewise, Sibelius works from essentially one theme stated in the first movement of his *Symphony No. 4*. The theme recurs in the following movements as well. The similarity between Ibsen and Sibelius is one of procedure and style. All artists develop their themes. But the concise and focused approach that develops a theme or two into a whole work belongs to Ibsen and Sibelius. The result bears an austerity that assists in defining action. The nature of the similarity between Sibelius and Ibsen can be witnessed in the following comment made by Sibelius when in conversation with Mahler. Discussing the symphony as a form, Sibelius responded that its essential nature resides in "the severity of style and the profound logic that create[s] an inner connection between all the motifs" (Abraham, 1947, 154). No description can come closer to what is evident in his *Symphony No. 4*, and to a lesser extent in other works, such as the first movement of *Symphony No. 1*. Burnett James wrote of Sibelius's music that "the intellectual and aural satisfaction received from a Sibelius symphony, beginning to end, is the result, to a large extent, of the inner logic and unity of his technique" (1983, 54).

"Inner logic and unity of . . . technique" describes Ibsen as well, especially during the period of *The Master Builder*. But even in his earlier period, Ibsen acknowledged the importance of a highly unified work and discussed how to achieve unification. He worked on *Pillars of Society* (1877) for seven years. During that time he wrote:

I have yet to solve the problem of retaining some sort of poetry and grandeur in my dramatic portrayal of modern life—not the poetry of words but of feeling and situation. But I have found out something that may help . . . manipulating the prosaic details of my plays so that they become theatrical metaphors . . . I have used costume in this way, lighting, scenery, landscape, and weather . . . I have used living figures as symbols of spiritual forces that act upon the hero. Perhaps these things could be brought into the context of a modern realistic play to help me to portray the modern hero and the tragic conflict which I now understand so well. (Fjelde, 99)

What the quote reveals is that symbols are subservient to realistic attributes. Ibsen now employs "prosaic details" as "theatrical metaphors," as a way of substantiating his unity of action,⁴ to develop a "modern realistic play" that portrays the "modern hero and the tragic conflict."

Since both of these artists began their careers in the nineteenth century and ended as unique stylists, it may be worth investigating if either of these works maintains any characteristics of Romanticism that would assist in defining the action as upholding Romantic ideals, or bring illumination to their qualities. The prevailing answer is that the given context is Romantic, and the action as a nascent idea evolves from this. As described above, the action in *The Master Builder* can be understood solely in relationship to Solness.⁵ The defining feature from which the action stems is Romantic: the hero with ideals to be achieved at any cost, suffering from experiencing subjective truth. Once these are put into the context of a condition—an individual's beliefs as vividly exposed through one's character and occupation in life—the boundary into "realism" has

been crossed. Symbolism was assigned to serve its end.

A similar statement can be made about the *Symphony No. 4*. The correlative procedure in the *Symphony* includes the notion that music evolves from itself. Referring to music, however, one must be careful to distinguish between action and motion. The time arts especially are always in motion, if we accept their contextualization of time as objectifying motion. The concern here is with how movement, whether thematic development of a plot or of a musical idea, is transformed and evolves to create meaningful action. If developed material has its source in what has been more modestly stated, then some action has evolved. The action is particularly "organic" when continuity results from internal relationships between one theme and the next. From a perspective that derives its understanding from technical analysis only, the *means* of thematic development provides the reason for the paradoxical statement made above, "music evolves from itself." In this case a nuclear theme becomes a source for generating new, but related material. Obviously, material that is completely new may be introduced at any point, and therefore may be all the more poignant. So the context from which action evolves is essential.

As stylistic characteristics, action and context point to the tumescent, exploitative aspect of Romanticism: in music, expanded forms, extended virtuosic passages, the grand ending that resists ending, the impassioned fervor, or as Mahler said in reply to Sibelius, "No, the symphony must be like the whole world. It must embrace everything" (Johnson, 1959, 130).

Sibelius's music certainly does not "embrace everything," but its lengthy phrases, subjective feelings of expression and extended harmonies show its roots in Romanticism. Rather than being "like the whole world," the music is specific in character, its action humble and true to itself. Its evocative power comes from its focus. This specificity does not negate its qualification as Romantic music, but rather supports it. When discussing the motivic development of Sibelius's first symphony, Burnett James notes.

Even at this early stage Sibelius's method has nothing in common with an *idée fixe* or with the 'cyclic form' used by

Elgar after Cesar Franck. It is the beginnings of a genuinely organic way of thinking and composing, the linking and interlocking of motifs nearer to the cellular evolution of living organisms (1983, 53n).

It required the historical progression of form itself as seen from the Baroque through Neoclassicism and into Romanticism for such a conception to have its venue. In Romanticism, artistic vision governed form which was loosened enough so that one's style was relatively freed from convention. Finally, we have seen how stylistic traits of Ibsen and Sibelius are similar. Although symbolism (Ibsen), modern, and romantic elements are evident, each artist focuses upon a limited number of ideas which are developed to create action. In each work, the action is defined through its inherent relationship with centralized themes and always remains close to them.

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Notes

¹Certainly there are other playwrights and composers who are frugal in their approach to unifying a work by focusing solely upon one or two ideas and manipulating them to generate seemingly new material. Johannes Brahms immediately comes to mind in this regard.

²In 1962, Richard Schechner published "The Unexpected Visitor in Ibsen's Late Plays," a Jungian reading that understands Hilda and the other visitors in Ibsen's plays as "sector[s] of the hero's mind which cannot be faced directly" (159). The article is reproduced in *Ibsen*, ed. Rolf Fjelde, 1965.

³Solness has succeeded in living with the "circumstances" established by God. However, in the third act he reveals a pessimistic belief: "Men have no use for these homes of theirs—to be happy in. And I should not have had any use for such a home, if I had one. See, that is the upshot of the whole affair, however far back I look. Nothing really built; nor anything sacrificed for the chance of building. Nothing, nothing! the whole is nothing." This exclamation serves to signify a crisis of faith. Now Solness is free to act according to his own dictates and to be his own God. Remaining with William James as a reference, he comes to the conclusion that one does not serve one's faith if there is not a change in one's behavior. Solness's belief in himself does change his behavior. He decides to climb the tower in the final act. Solness and Hilda proclaim their love for one another and will attempt to build castles in the air "on a firm foundation."

But does Solness really believe that this is possible? Even as a tragic hero, throughout the play he has exhibited an understanding of the "circumstances" and used them to succeed. Castles in the air on a firm foundation—is less a metaphor than a paradox. Is Solness that swayed by Hilda or is there something else he is not revealing? Perhaps his fall was not that at all, but a suicide. His statement that "the whole is nothing" signifies the rupture with his religious belief; he is now left in a meaningless life. He says to Hilda that he will build castles in the air. But upon climbing the tower he says, "Hear me Mighty Lord—thou may'st judge me as seems best to thee. But hereafter I will build nothing but the loveliest thing in the world." Presumably this "thing" is his love and life with Hilda. Equally, if Solness did jump, then this "thing" becomes a life united with God. Ibsen never says with certainty. What he does have Solness say is that, "Now I shall go down and throw my arms around her and kiss

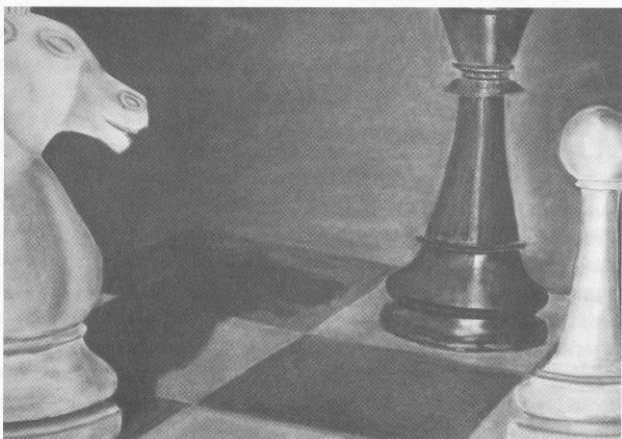
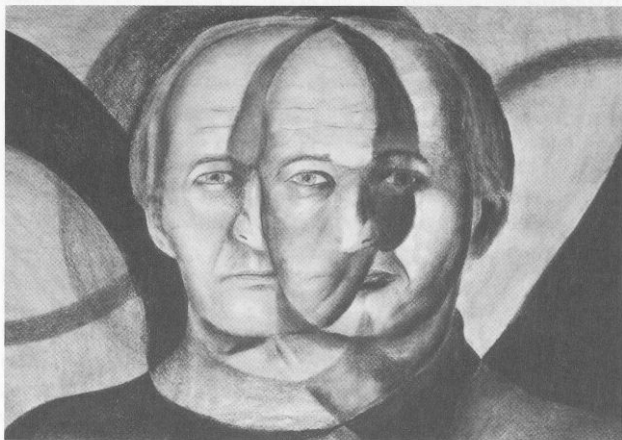
her," something that never really happened when referred to in the first act, or at best it was left ambiguous. Will the dream come true? Or does Solness realize its impossibility—that the "whole is nothing"—and jumps?

⁴The use of the Aristotelian phrase *unity of action* is employed cautiously. It would be interesting to examine the Aristotelian unity of action in relationship to both these artists, but here time did not permit it.

⁵The inspiration that helped design Solness as a character came from experiences in Ibsen's life. At the age of 61 Ibsen met his own "Hilda," an Austrian girl much younger than the playwright. He managed to suppress the enticement which came from knowing her. The autobiographical details of the play have been well documented. For a terse reference, see *Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre*, Martin Esslin, Doubleday, 1969, 44.

Drawings

BY WILLIAM SPEZESKI



Book Review

BY ROBERT BENCE

In Search of History *Presidencies, Personalities and Policies*

The Dark Side of Camelot

by Seymour Hersh. Little Brown and Company, 1997

Taking Charge; The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964

by Michael R. Beschloss. Simon and Schuster, 1997

Does a president make history, or does history make a president? Given the recent flurry of scholarly and popular attention to chief executives and their relatives, one could conclude that the answer is neither. The ultimate definitions of both leaders and their eras are the result of construction, deconstruction, and endless reconstruction by journalists, film directors, playwrights and, if we are fortunate, occasional perceptive historians. Key U.S. political actors of the 1960s are particularly susceptible to being currently revised, thanks in large part to the Freedom of Information Act, discovery and release of dusty audio tapes, newly talkative "eye witnesses" and ex-lovers who desire to secure their place on the

record and an enthusiastic audience of aging baby boomers. Journalist Seymour Hersh and historian Michael Beschloss have relied heavily on their respective crafts to revisit the life and times of presidents Kennedy and Johnson, men who were responsible for some of the most crucial policies of the 20th century, whose effects we will continue to benefit and suffer from well into the next millennium.

Hersh, always the investigative journalist, chose the deductive (destructive?) route to truth, funneling every possible shred of evidence in an attempt to support the contention that a philandering, Mafia-cavorting, often medicinally drug-impaired John F. Kennedy jeopardized American foreign policy by his insatiable desire for new sexual conquests (although the securing of prostitutes required only minimal seductive abilities), nude co-ed romps in the White House swimming pool, and midnight liaisons with an East German temptress. In short, JFK fiddled while Pax Americana burned. (Of course we are now painfully aware that presidents can compartmentalize their lives, separating private sin and public policy.) When the self-focused president did attend to the affairs of state, his attention centered on a dangerous obsession with Fidel Castro and a coldly calculated willingness to assassinate uncontrollable or inconvenient world leaders such as South Vietnam's Diem and Congo's Lumumba. And all these violations of public and private trust were covered up willingly by a milquetoast press, a heretofore loyal staff and an enabling family, primarily his fanatically protective brother Bobby, the self-designated keeper of Kennedy secrets. Dabbling in amateur psychology, Hersh would have us to believe that misbehavior, machoism, and corruption were an inevitable result of the Kennedy/Fitzgerald family heritage. Granddad Honey Fitz and father Joe connived, cheated, and bought their way to power (should we be surprised that money is a major factor in politics?), so how could we expect any less of our youngest president? It was in his genes.

Not a great deal of new information is contained in Hersh's work. Using an exposé style, it is a titillating read, and could easily be scripted into an entertaining movie, although the plot would

overlap with a number of previous productions. Probably many, if not most, of Hersh's assertions have much basis in reality. Yes, the 1960 West Virginia primary was bought with Dad's money. The CIA was instructed to find James Bond-like ways to kill Fidel. The Kennedy family had a clandestine relationship with mob elements. J. Edgar Hoover was not above blackmail. The most disturbing feature of Hersh's prolific investigation (five years, 1000 interviews) is the questionable assembling of the information and loose construction of unsubstantiated inferences. Some sources are quoted anonymously, some weak sources are used exclusively to bolster a major point, and a few assertions push the credulity meter to its limits. A few charges are simply not supported by any evidence. For example, the contention that Lyndon Johnson politically extorted Kennedy in order to secure the 1960 vice presidential nomination is unsubstantiated by any credible evidence. It is also difficult to believe that mobster Sam Giancana single handedly won Illinois for the Democratic ticket (the mobilization power of Daley's Chicago politburo still affords the most plausible explanation). Should we easily accept Hersh's belief that a devious FBI director and a high-living mobster (with a little help from Frank Sinatra) held the fate of the presidency and U.S. foreign policy in their amoral hands? However, if you come to bury John Kennedy, Hersh offers a devastating eulogy.

Michael Beschloss, historian and television personality, offers us an alternative method for examining a president and his times. Selectively using recently released tapes of Lyndon Baines Johnson's White House conversations and phone calls, Beschloss leads us through LBJ's political travails in the year after Kennedy's death. And what a crucial year it was. We gain a sense of Johnson's famed manipulative skills, insecurities and vulnerabilities as he confronts the Kennedy legacy, arch-rival Bobby Kennedy, byzantine Texas politics, the shaky Warren Commission procedures, as well as the formulation of crucial far-reaching policies such as decisions about Vietnam, the War on Poverty and the first major civil rights legislation since the Civil War era. As a properly trained historian, Beschloss proceeds inductively, laying out edited conversations,

supplemented by footnoted comments and additional source material. There are no grand conspiracy theories in this book, only some well-organized documentation which affords readers the welcome relief of postulating our own conclusions. For some reason Johnson was a compulsive taper. And while we are warned that this president, aware of how this recorded history might judge him, may have been cagily dishonest, the imprecise wording, off-color language and occasional self-incriminating statements make us want to believe that this is the "real" LBJ.

The transcribed Lyndon Johnson often seems like the man liberals in the 1960s knew and usually disliked. He plots strategies for keeping Bobby Kennedy off the 1964 ticket and schemes against his friends to insure Democrats were elected to government in the Lone Star state. His well-honed skills in pressuring people through personal obligation are amply illustrated. While using his "I'm just a simple country boy" affect, he badgers his staff, manipulates reporters, and forcefully directs senators to suppress investigations of the infamous Bobby Baker which might link insurance company kickbacks to the Johnsons and their Texas television empire. And lest we forget, Johnson's conversations also remind us of his key role in supporting a CIA coup in Brazil, secretly bombing Laos, overreacting to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, and undermining the Mississippi Freedom Delegation's plea for racial fairness and representation at the 1964 Democratic convention. And it is tortuous to read how LBJ and J. Edgar Hoover pretend to be mutually supportive. In one of many clearly insincere statements made to almost everyone, Johnson says to Hoover, "You are my brother and personal friend." For Johnson, the line between friends and enemies is hopelessly blurred. All of his political acquaintances seem to be both.

But presidents are human, not unidimensional nor inherently evil. Beschloss' editing offers insights into the kinder, gentler fabric of Johnson's character. To a large extent LBJ took the leadership role of the presidency seriously, and there was more than a hint of compassion mixed in with base political survival. He refused to compromise on the 1964 Civil Rights Act, when compromise would probably have produced an easy and fairly risk free victory. Risking

the alienation of his southern base on the eve of an election, Johnson pulled out most of the stops in ordering a federal government search for the three missing (later found dead) civil rights workers in Mississippi. And it is touching to read the seemingly loving exchanges between Johnson and the ever supportive Lady Bird. An often sleepless Johnson is insecure and pathetic in the tradition of a rapidly falling Greek hero. While Johnson's abrasive, intimidating style no doubt contributed to his isolation, he was uncontrollably saddled with Kennedy holdover advisors whose loyalty to the unsophisticated Texan was clearly suspect. To compensate, Johnson sought consolation and counsel with his old Senate buddies, but the transition from Capitol Hill to the White House moved those relationships to a more competitive level. Being president finally insured that LBJ could never be at peace: "And what I want is great solace, a little love. That's all I want." But we all know the ending to this tragedy, and his personality and position guaranteed the impossibility of either private solace or public love.

While Beschloss provides the documentation and Hersh the judgment, both efforts give us less than complete explanations of presidential behavior in the early sixties. No doubt personality is vital to explaining actions and policies. But other systemic forces were at work here, and American democracy and policy were jeopardized not only by presidents' libidos and crass desires for power. Any president has to confront the irrational conflicting demands of American economic and political values (economic freedom and political equality), has to massage and manage competing intra-political party factions, has to function inside the often paralyzing complex system of separation of powers, as well as to locate and devote huge sums of money to secure nominations and win elections. These factors promote presidential secrecy and the temptation to control the dissemination of information.

Beschloss and Hersh offer some keen insights into the modus operandi of the pre-Watergate press and its manipulation by presidents. While it is refreshing to know there was a time when a president's sex life was not the lead story on the evening news, Kennedy and Johnson, through carefully nursed personal connections, were able to keep crucial information away from a naive

public. Ben Bradlee (*Newsweek* and *The Washington Post*) and Frank Stanton (CBS) were apparently completely co-opted by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Would U.S. policies have taken other directions had the mainstream fourth estate abandoned its deference to the commander in chiefs? Could this protective press have better served the republic?

Kennedy ordered the CIA to assassinate world leaders. Johnson developed plans to undermine democracies and escalate the war in Vietnam. But is this a result of their well-known personal flaws, or of carrying on well-established Cold War traditions? What president has not wanted to eliminate Castro? And what Oval Office occupant seriously tried to rein in the ever-imaginative CIA or the self-serving J. Edgar Hoover? Indeed, former President Eisenhower advised Kennedy to take a tough stand on Cuba, and the Cuban invasion plans were developed by the Dulles brothers prior to the 1960 election. And could any ambitious politician before 1989 win election to the presidency who did not advocate a zealous opposition to communism? Hersh recounts the commonly held view that JFK expressed a desire to scale back U.S. commitment to Vietnam after safely securing a second term. But isn't this the same president who refused to negotiate with North Vietnam, and selected Robert McNamara as his Secretary of Defense, soon to be a trusted Johnson advisor who continually recommended military solutions for Southeast Asia? While Hersh tells us that Kennedy had qualms about authorizing the Bay of Pigs invasion, we also find out that the president considered a preemptive bombing of Chinese nuclear facilities.

The Johnson conversations more clearly demonstrate how big-power politics and the well-developed and broadly held American anti-communist sentiments shaped electoral politics and presidential decision making. Constantly under public criticism for his lack of experience and expertise in foreign policy, Johnson felt trapped by the Vietnam conundrum. Continually informed of the lack of democracy, stability and support for the U.S. in what remained of the South Vietnamese government, and as a true believer in the domino theory, along with his advisors and American society in

general, Johnson believed his options were limited. The only logical choice for a president boxed in by these political and ideological boundaries was non-negotiation with communists and pursuit of military solutions. And there were always a plethora of advisors ready to recommend a variety of increasing deadly options. Neither Hersh nor Beschloss afford any optimism that a second JFK term would have looked much differently at Vietnam. At this stage in history the Cold War had a life of its own, consuming even well-meaning elites inside and outside of government.

It does matter whom we elect as president. Victories by Richard Nixon in 1960 or Barry Goldwater in 1964 would probably have not produced presidents who befriended the same mobsters, or enthusiastically initiated a Peace Corps or declared a War on Poverty. But it serves us well to remember that systemic factors such as campaign financing, the American ideology, international politics and vagaries of our electoral system shape presidential behavior as much as quirky presidential neuroses. Personality and character are not the only explanations for policy. We may enjoy reading about a "great man's" idiosyncracies and obsessions, but broader perspectives are essential to understanding the actions of governments and their leaders.

Contributors

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THE MIND'S EYE

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